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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1318

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER LE IS SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MODERATE REFORM MP BELIEVES CHAPTER VII
IS NOW ONLY WAY TO ESTABLISH TRIBUNAL

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

ARGUMENT FOR CHAPTER VII

¶11. (C) In a 4/12 meeting with emboff, pro-reform MP Robert Ghanem suggested that Hizballah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, acting under Syrian/Iranian orders, has altered his strategy following the collapse of the erratic Berri-Hariri talks. Ghanem maintained that once it became clear that Saad Hariri was not going to compromise on either the "blocking minority" in the cabinet or the gutting of the Special Tribunal, the Syrians then shifted to a waiting game. Ghanem, a dark-horse candidate for the presidency (but more likely to remain an influential progressive in parliament), thinks that the Syrians are confident that time is on their side -- in their view, sooner or later the Siniora government will leave office and the tribunal will disappear with it.

¶12. (C) Ghanem reported that he had hoped a Berri-Hariri compromise would have been reached with the support of Saudi Arabia, and a tacit "no objection" stance from Iran. But based on discussions with numerous figures in both March 14th and the opposition, he now believes that Syria has been able to derail any Berri-Hariri accord. As a result, he sees Chapter VII as the only way to achieve the tribunal. Furthermore, he argued that preparations for a Chapter VII resolution will not persuade the Syrians to relent and perhaps seek a compromise, because Bashar al-Asad appears confident that there are not enough votes in the Security Council to pass a Chapter VII resolution.

¶13. (C) Ghanem considers Chapter VII a risky action, because if the measure fails in the Council, the anti-reform forces of Hizballah and Michel Aoun will look like winners in the now two-year old struggle for the future of Lebanon. Ghanem cautioned that the country's citizens are exhausted by the struggle and only two things can now turn the tide: establishment of the tribunal by the international community, or the replacement of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud with a reform, or at least neutral, candidate.

¶14. (C) Ghanem worried that Syrian security operatives may strike at the pro-reform leaders in the event of a successful Security Council vote, but he still insisted that Chapter VII was worth the risk. Without Chapter VII, and with the continued enforced recess of parliament by pro-Syrian Speaker Nabih Berri and his Hizballah allies, the tribunal concept would gradually, but almost assuredly, recede from the scene.

¶ 15. (C) Concerning the upcoming election for Lebanon's presidency, scheduled for late November, MP Ghanem said that contrary to the claims of many March 14th politicians, he is convinced that a two-thirds vote is necessary to elect the new chief executive. Without a two-thirds vote, any candidate would not be considered legitimate by an uncomfortably large segment of the electorate. Although it would be difficult, he argued, the best chance to elect a unifying figure, who would fight for Lebanon's sovereignty, is to peel away enough deputies from the March 8-Aoun alliance so that a two-thirds majority can be achieved. Ghanem insisted there are delegates in the March 8-Aoun alliance who could be persuaded to join the pro-reform majority, but only if an acceptable candidate could be found.

And it was important to begin these discreet inquiries now, before the approach of the November deadline ratchets up sectarian tensions.

FELTMAN